

# **Julia Wasserman**

## *Biography*

Throughout her service in the state House of Representatives, state Representative Julia B. Wasserman has been a strong and effective advocate for the people of Newtown while serving in a variety of leadership positions.

Representative Wasserman was appointed House Ranking Member (Republican Leader) on the General Assembly's Public Health Committee for the 2005 and 2006 legislative sessions. She also was re-appointed to the Appropriations Committee, which is responsible for developing the state's budget.

During the 2003 and 2004 legislative sessions, she chaired the General Assembly's Program Review and Investigations Committee - the only member of the minority party in the House of Representatives to chair a standing legislative committee. She previously served as the Program Review and Investigations Committee's House Chairman in 1999. She is a former House Ranking Member on the Select Committee on Housing

The Program Review Committee is the General Assembly's nonpartisan oversight panel. In 2001 and 2002, Representative Wasserman served as the committee's Ranking Member.

She is the former Chairman of the Task Force to Study the Use of the Fairfield Hills State Property (1992 – 1995). She also served on the Fairfield Hills Implementation Oversight Committee and the eight-member Selection Committee responsible for reviewing proposals and making a final recommendation to the Governor and the General Assembly on the future uses of the property.

Two parcels of state land were transferred to Newtown under the 2004 Conveyance Act, which Representative Wasserman cosponsored. Both of the parcels are located on Mile Hill Road on the Fairfield Hills Hospital grounds. One of the parcels, which totals 23.25 acres, has been preserved as open space and is reserved for passive recreational activities such as hiking and fishing. The other parcel, which has an area of about 12 acres, is being used for municipal purposes.

The 2003 Conveyance Act authorized the transfer of another two parcels of state land to Newtown, which was preserved as open space. The parcels, which provide linkage with existing town-owned open space and recreation areas, are reserved for passive recreation activities. The first parcel (about 34.44 acres) is bounded on the west by the Housatonic railroad right-of-way property line; on the north by a 38-acre parcel that was sold to the town for economic development; and on the east and south by a 22-acre parcel conveyed to the town along Deep Brook. The second parcel (about 4 acres) is bounded on the southwest by town-owned land; on the northwest and the north by the 22-acre parcel conveyed to the town along Deep Brook; on the east by property owned by the state; and on the south by Old Farm Road. Hiking trails are being established within them to link up

with existing trails on adjacent town-owned open space and recreation areas and will become part of the town-wide trail system.

Additionally, Representative Wasserman was responsible for securing the conveyance of more than 250 acres at Fairfield Hills from the Department of Mental Health to the Department of Agriculture for preservation in perpetuity as open space and agricultural land.

Representative Wasserman played a major role in gaining approval from the state Department of Transportation for a project that eliminated a major traffic hazard in Newtown - the replacement of the railroad bridge over Route 6 (Churchill Road). The \$5,300,000 project - most of which was funded by federal and state grants (80% federal, 20% state) totaling about \$4-million - got underway April 1, 2002 and was completed at the end of September. The old bridge had been the scene of several accidents involving over-height vehicles colliding with the upper portion of the structure. As part of the project, the roadway underpass was widened to provide a 12-foot travel lane and a four-foot shoulder in each direction. The minimum vertical clearance was increased to 14 feet, 10 inches to allow for passage of all legal-sized vehicles.

An amendment to the prison overcrowding law (P. A. 04-234) initiated by Representative Wasserman addresses violence problems at the Garner Correctional Institution stemming from the transfer there of prisoners with mental health issues. The measure adds the Commissioner of Mental Health and Addiction Services to the Commission on Prison and Jail Overcrowding. It also requires the commission to establish a subcommittee on corrections behavioral health to make recommendations on providing behavioral health services to inmates.

A law (P. A. 04-146) that originated in the Program Review and Investigations Committee addresses concerns about state correction officer staffing and its impact on safety. Under the act, the Department of Correction (DOC) must make reports to the legislature about specific safety indicators, such as inmate assaults on correction officers and requires DOC to study the relationship between staff overtime and workers' compensation claims.

With the goal of streamlining government, the legislature also established a Commission on Government Accountability, Creativity and Efficiency (P. A. 04-146). The panel is charged with building on work begun in 2003 to look for "new approaches to bring government spending under control and make state government more cost effective."

During her 2001-2002 term, Representative Wasserman cosponsored a law (P.A. 02-95) that established moratoriums on final approval by state agencies of proposals to build overland electric transmission lines from Bethel to Norwalk, and energy and telecommunications lines under the Long Island Sound seabed between Connecticut and Long Island.

The act required an independent panel to review the Bethel to Norwalk project and prohibited state agencies from rendering a final decision on it until the panel finished its report and recommendations.

Representative Wasserman also helped secure state funding for a variety of Newtown projects, including:

- An Open Space and Watershed Acquisition Grant totaling \$138,775 that helped the town purchase a 20.92-acre parcel adjacent to the Pole Bridge Open Space Preserve.
- A \$475,000 grant to help pay for streetscape and beautification improvements in the Sandy Hook center business district.
- Funding totaling \$80 million to help purchase 642 acres of watershed land in Newtown owned by the Kelda Group.
- A \$15,000 grant for Newtown Friends of Music Inc. to support the organization's Visiting Artists and School Outreach Program.
- State funding totaling \$9.5 million to help pay for a new 5/6 grade school in the vicinity of Wasserman Way.
- A \$50,000 grant to help pay for drainage and irrigation work and reconstruction of ball fields at Treadwell Park.
- A \$50,000 grant to the Blue and Gold Club for lighting at the Newtown High School stadium.

Representative Wasserman cosponsored or supported several bills that became law during the 2003 and 2004 legislative sessions. Those Laws:

- Require coal-burning electric power plants to reduce their mercury emissions to improve air quality in Connecticut.
- Make all veterans who have 90 days of active duty service since August 2, 1990 eligible for state property tax reduction, education and other benefits. Previously, only veterans who had served during specific times of war were eligible for the benefits.
- Give Connecticut residents the option of choosing Medical Savings Accounts over conventional health insurance plans. Individuals and families who open MSAs can make annual tax-deductible contributions to their accounts. Interest earnings are tax-free, as is the case with funds withdrawn to pay for medical expenses.
- Make it easier for early retirees to continue their group health insurance from age 62 to 65, until they are eligible for Medicare.
- Help ensure proposed new power lines are not erected near schools, playgrounds, or other areas where children congregate to reduce the threat of exposure to potentially harmful electromagnetic fields.

- Exempt municipal and state agencies from being required to transcribe and preserve messages left on telephone answering machines - making it virtually impossible for the state Freedom of Information Commission to impose another mandate on state and local government. Preserving thousands of routine voice mail messages would have added major costs to local and state government and led to tax increases.
- Direct the Department of Environmental Protection to adopt regulations requiring (beginning with the 2008 model year) more cars sold in the state to meet tougher emissions standards to improve air quality in Fairfield County and elsewhere in Connecticut.
- Allow Connecticut residents to obtain health savings accounts - tax-exempt personal savings accounts that enable those who open them to save money for future medical expenses.

Several measures Representative Wasserman initiated or supported also became law during the 2001 – 2002 legislative sessions. Under those acts:

- Terrorism was established as a crime in Connecticut. The law also created the crimes of contaminating a public water or food supply and damaging public transportation property for terrorist purposes and defined fabricating weapons involving chemicals, disease organisms or radiation as terrorist crimes.
- Municipalities were allowed to increase their optional property tax assessment reduction for low-income wartime veterans and their surviving spouses. The law also requires that military discharge documents filed by veterans with public agencies be kept separate from their other records and remain confidential for 75 years.
- Surviving spouses and children of Connecticut residents killed in the 9/11 terrorist attacks are exempted from having to pay tuition at state institutions of higher education. The law also designated September 11<sup>th</sup> as “Remembrance Day” to memorialize those killed in the attacks.

During the 2000 legislative session, Representative Wasserman worked to enact three measures of importance to Newtown. The laws:

- Conveyed ownership of 3.6 acres of state-owned land to the town. The land is located behind Newtown High School and is used for youth sports and recreation.
- Increased from \$100,000 to \$200,000 the amount a charitable organization must raise before it is required to have a formal audit conducted of its annual report. Without this change, the Sandy Hook Volunteer Fire Department would have had to pay \$13,000 or more for the state-mandated audit, reducing the amount the organization would retain from its fund-raising activities. The law also benefits other charitable organizations around the state in the same way.
- Allowed victims of ‘identity theft’ to sue the violator for damages. The legislation was requested by constituents whose Social Security numbers had been stolen.

Also, in 2000, Representative Wasserman, working with state officials, put together an agreement under which the state sold 37.6 acres of land to Newtown to expand Commerce Park at a cost of only \$1.

Legislation originated by Representative Wasserman during her first year in the General Assembly in 1991 was the basis for Public Act 91-335, an act concerning The Regulation of Forest Practices and the Certification of Forest Practitioners. It was the first major environmental law to regulate forest practices (including commercial harvesting) in the state. It also set up a required certification system for loggers and foresters.

She was the Co-Chair of the Water Resources Task Force, which examined issues relating to water supplies, including the impact of development on artesian wells.

Representative Wasserman also has served on the Dialysis Task Force and as Secretary of the Connecticut Order of Women Legislators.

Representative Wasserman served four terms on the Newtown Legislative Council, 13 years as state Department of Environmental Protection appointee to the King's Mark Resource Conservation and Development Project, ten years on the Newtown Conservation Commission and six years on the Fairfield County Soil and Water Conservation District. She is a former member of the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials' 208 Water Quality Management Program.

A former Director of Health for the Town of New Fairfield, Connecticut, Representative Wasserman holds a Bachelor of Arts Degree from Sarah Lawrence College and a Master of Public Health Degree from Columbia University, where she has served as a Guest Lecturer. She currently serves as a member of the Board of Advisors of the Joseph L. Mailman School of Public Health, Columbia University.

She is a veteran of the United States Army, where she held the rank of Captain (WAC).